

AL 661

Background Paper on Persecution of Argentinian Scientists

May 31, 1977

Introduction

The charter of the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility (CSFR) includes a charge to maintain an awareness of actions by the governments of the United States and foreign countries which circumvent scientific freedom.^{1/} During its first meeting in October 1976, the Committee became aware of recent attacks on physicists and other scientists in Argentina. Since then, the committee has attempted to learn more about both the general extent of these persecutions, and the detailed circumstances surrounding individual cases of repressions of Argentinian scientists and scholars.

The Committee has found that violations of human rights have occurred in Argentina on a broad scale, especially since the military coup d'état of March 23, 1976. According to estimates published by Amnesty International (AI), as of January 1977 there were 5,000 to 6,000 political prisoners, two-thirds of whom have not been charged but are detained indefinitely, at the disposal of the Executive Power in Argentina.^{2/} AI further estimates that 15,000 persons have disappeared or been abducted in Argentina over the last two and a half years, as a result of arrests or abductions. It is difficult to determine how many of these political prisoners or missing persons are scientists or engineers.

In addition to these AI figures, there have been numerous reports by various other groups describing arbitrary dismissals of scientists from their jobs in Argentina. The purpose of this background paper is to summarize these reports and to describe the initial CSFR responses to the persecution of Argentinian scientists.

Dismissals of Scientists and Engineers

Although a detailed listing of individual cases or general estimates of arbitrary dismissals of Argentinian scientists and engineers is not available, the Committee has obtained some information regarding the scientific research or training institutions which have been directly affected by actions of the Argentinian government. SCIENCE has reported that:

According to a letter sent to General Videla (President of Argentina) by a group of Mexican scientists and intellectuals, nearly a hundred research scientists supported by Argentina's Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Cientificas Y Technologicas (CONICET) have been fired, and more than 600 have been fired from other government research institutions such as the National Research Institute for Agriculture and Cattle Breeding, the National Institute for Industrial Technology, the National Physics and Technology Institute at San Miguel, and the National Atomic Energy Committee.^{3/}

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S2000000044)

1. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPs

Robert P. Grafeld, Director

1. Release () Excise () Deny

Implication(s):

Classify: () In Part () In Full

Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Declassify on Reason

These same institutions and estimates were published in a report prepared by Amnesty International (10 Jan. 1977).^{4/}

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In addition, the Argentine Society of Physics (Sociedad Fisica Argentina, SFA) estimated that approximately one quarter of their membership have lost their jobs in late 1976. A listing prepared by SFA of over fifty physicists or engineers working in physics, fired from various National Agencies in Argentina or from Universities in La Plata, Rosario, Cordoba, and Tucuman, has been circulated to physicists in Europe and the U.S.^{5/}

Regarding the impact of these dismissals, J. Leite Lopes, director of the division of high energies at the Center for Nuclear Research, University of Strasbourg, France, noted in the BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS (December 1976):

I have just received information that scientists in Argentina...are being dismissed from their jobs and forbidden to accept jobs in any educational or scientific institute in the country. At least 56 men and women associated with the Argentine National Research Council, including biologists like M. Cereijido; several collaborators of L.F. Leloir, an Argentine Nobel laureate in chemistry; and physicists...have been summarily dismissed by the "Interventor" of the council and by the military junta.

I personally know what this means, not only for the possibility of continuation of one's own scientific work but also for the anxieties, personal crises and family suffering which ensue.^{6/}

Physicists are not the only scientists affected by these dismissals in Argentina. SCIENCE has reported that the letter from the group of Mexican intellectuals to General Videla stated also that "several hundreds" of physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers who worked for hospitals and mental health centers in Argentina have been dismissed.^{7/} OUTREACH, a report published by the Argentine Information Service Center, noted in October 1976 that the following dismissals had occurred in psychology and psychiatry:

The School of Psychology of the University of Buenos Aires has been dismantled and 90% of its faculty fired. The three Mental Health Centers of the City of Buenos Aires have been closed and the Departments of Psychiatry located in the hospitals of the industrial belt of Buenos Aires intervened (sic) and their functioning reduced to 10% of normal.^{8/}

OUTREACH further noted that the Argentine Federation of Psychiatrists (AFP) had circulated a statement denouncing the abduction, disappearance or imprisonment without trial of nine Argentine psychiatrists, and reported that the quarters of the AFP had been repeatedly raided by the Argentine police.^{9/}

Amnesty International has also detailed reductions in the medical staff of various Argentine mental hospitals. Their report notes that the Borda Hospital in Buenos Aires is a representative example of the extent of the cuts:

The Borda had a full-time staff of 120 doctors and psychologists (caring) for 2,300 inmates and running an out-patients' clinic. In April 1976, seven heads of departments were "suspended" and more than 100

volunteers dismissed...The prestigious psychiatric department of the Lanus hospital which taught students from all over Latin America has also suffered badly... The number of beds in the psycho-pathology unit and neurology unit has been reduced by 50%. The psychiatric wing of the Avellaneda hospital has been virtually forced to close after the dismissal of 58 doctors.^{10/}

Arrests and Abductions of Argentinian Scientists

Information about arrests or abductions of scientists in Argentina is very sketchy and incomplete, and personal witnesses to such incidents often risk their own safety by giving details to outside groups. Once learning about an arrest or abduction, however, it is important for an outside group to make its concerns known to appropriate government agencies. In his BAS article, J. Leite Lopes states:

The solidarity of the international scientific community is the greatest -- and perhaps the only -- external help that a scientist in such a situation can receive.^{11/}

The AAAS Committee has prepared a list of names of eleven individuals, who appear to have been arrested or abducted by the Argentine government. The Committee has submitted this list to the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and has requested the Commission to do an on-site visit to Argentina in order to investigate these cases. The eleven individuals are:

1) Antonio MISETICH. Dr. Misetich is an Argentinian physicist of international reputation. He was arrested at his home in Buenos Aires on April 19, 1976, and imprisoned without formal charge. Initially, his arrest and detention were acknowledged through correspondence between U.S. scientists and the Argentine Embassy in Washington, D.C. More recently, however, representatives of the Argentine Foreign Ministry maintain that he was not arrested and that his whereabouts are unknown.^{12/}

Dr. Misetich is 38 years old, and obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Buenos Aires in 1964. From 1965-1966 he was a staff member at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey. In 1966 he went to the Francis Bitter National Magnet Laboratory at MIT and also worked at Brookhaven National Laboratory. In 1970, he returned to Argentina and became a staff scientist at the Argentine National Atomic Energy Commission (Comision Nacional de Energia Atomica, CNEA). He held this position until his arrest, except for a year as Professor and Head of the Physical Chemistry Department at the University of Buenos Aires in 1973-1974. His Research interests include Solid State Physics and Magnetism and Optical Properties of Magnetic Materials.^{13/}

After the arrest of Dr. Misetich in April 1976, the Director of the National Magnet Laboratory at MIT wrote to the current Director of CNEA in Buenos Aires, offering a position to Misetich if the Argentinian authorities were to grant him permission to leave the country. It is not known whether or not this offer has been communicated to Dr. Misetich.

2) Federico ALVAREZ ROJAS. Dr. Alvarez Rojas is a physicist and has worked at CNEA since 1968, most recently as the director of the X-ray diffraction laboratory. His wife (Hilda Leikis de Alvarez Rojas) is a computer programmer, and worked at Bairesco S.A. (Burroughs). On October 1, 1976, Dr. Alvarez Rojas and his wife were abducted from their home by an armed group, believed to be acting on behalf of the Argentinian government. Since that time, vigorous efforts to find them have been made by the father of Dr. Alvarez Rojas, representatives of the Catholic church, and the Red Cross without success. There is no information on where they might be held nor the state of their health.14/

3) Juan Carlos GALLARDO. Dr. Gallardo received his Ph.D. at Yeshiva University in 1970 under the supervision of Prof. Leonard Susskind. Dr. Gallardo was the director of the Institute for Mathematics, Astronomy and Physics (IMAF) at the National University of Cordoba, until 1974 when he resigned in protest of government restrictions of campus activities. Dr. Gallardo remained at the Institute as a professor after his resignation. He was arrested in early March 1976 (before the March military coup) and has been charged with participation with guerillas. He has been held in a Cordoba prison (Sierra Chica) since that time, and is still believed to be there. The Committee has learned that the Chairman of the Physics Department at the Yeshiva University has written to the IMAF offering a position to Dr. Gallardo, without response.15/

4) Gabriella CARABELLI. Dr. Carabelli was also a physicist and a member of the faculty of the IMAF in Cordoba. She had previously worked in the Quantum Chemistry Group, University of Uppsala, in Sweden. She was arrested, along with her daughter in February 1976, and has not been located since that time. There is an unconfirmed report that her body has been found.16/

5) Eduardo PASQUINI. Dr. Pasquini is a nuclear physicist who has worked at the Center for Nuclear Studies in Saclay, Paris (1970-73) and in the Center for Nuclear Research in Strasbourg (Oct. 1975-March 1976). He then taught in the Physics Department, as an associate professor, at the University of Rosario. His wife is Dr. Liliana Mizraji de Pasquini, a renowned psychologist in Rosario, and also taught at the University, as an associate professor in the Faculty of Psychology. Both Dr. Pasquini and his wife were abducted from their home by a military commando of the Argentine army on the night of June 10, 1976. There is no information on their location or status.17/

6) Claudio BERMAN. Dr. Berman is a psychiatrist practicing in Cordoba, and was director of a small clinic there. He is also the brother of Dr. Sylvia Berman (see below). He was arrested at his home on April 27, 1976 by an army patrol, and was then apparently held in an old army prison in Cordoba (Campo de la Rivera). Afterwards he was transferred to a prison for those already serving trial sentences, and used for political prisoners. The military authorities have declined to inform this family of his whereabouts and it was only through an anonymous phone call (from one of his former patients who witnessed the transfer of Dr. Berman) that the family learned his location. He is now held completely incommunicado and without charges.18/

7) Sylvia BERMAN. Dr. Berman, a former president of the Argentine Federation of Psychiatrists (AFP), is also a psychiatrist with a private practice in Cordoba. In September 1976, the AFP denounced the methods

used by the Argentine government in their arrests and prisons; on November 13, military officials came to the home of Dr. Berman and arrested her daughter (Irene Torrents) and grandson. The officials also went to another home and arrested the fiancé of her second daughter. Dr. Berman herself has gone into hiding, but has continued to denounce these abductions through telegrams to the government. There is no information on the location of her relatives or her own whereabouts.19/

8) Monica MIGNONE. Ms. Mignone is a school teacher and educational psychologist who worked in Buenos Aires. She is also the daughter of Dr. Emilio Mignone, former Deputy Commissioner of Education for Argentina and former Ambassador of Education at the OAS. Ms. Mignone was arrested in May 1976 by four military men who appeared at her father's home. Dr. Mignone has been unable to obtain any information on his daughter's location or status.20/

9) Mario YACUB. Mr. Yacub is the President of the Argentine Lawyers Association, professor of law and political science, and one of the few lawyers working with political prisoners in Buenos Aires. Mr. Yacub was kidnapped by six armed civilians at his office on November 8, 1976. There has been no additional information on his location or status.21/

10) Horacio DATTORI. Dr. Dattori is an Argentine astrophysicist, formerly employed at the IMAF in Cordoba, until his dismissal after the military coup in March 1976. Dr. Dattori disappeared in August 1976, and is assumed to have been kidnapped by Argentine government forces. Dr. Dattori previously worked in Germany from 1971 to 1973 at the Max Planck Institute fur Physik und Astrophysik, under the supervision of Dr. Ehlers. Since his abduction, the relatives of Dr. Dattori have attempted to trace him without success. It is rumored that Dr. Dattori is being held in a concentration camp known as "La Perla" in Argentina.22/

11) Valentin BARENBLITT. Dr. Barenblitt is an Argentine psychiatrist who worked as the head of the psychiatric department of Policlinico de Lanus in Buenos Aires. In April 1976, during the widespread dismissals at Lanus, Dr. Barenblitt was suspended. On April 21, 1977, he was allegedly abducted in Buenos Aires. Shortly after his abduction, however, it was learned that he had been released but is still under suspension.23/

There are numerous other individual cases, involving physicists, biochemists, psychiatrists and psychologists, which have been brought to the attention of the Committee through various reports and press articles on general repressions in Argentina.

Communications with the OAS

The Chairman of the AAAS Committee (Dr. H. Bentley Glass) first wrote to the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in November 1976, expressing concern about the reports of arrests and dismissals of scientists in Argentina. The executive secretary to the Commission replied that this letter could not be processed without information on individual cases.

A second letter was sent from the AAAS Committee to the AS on February 7, 1977, which included documentation on the first nine cases listed above. The Commission's executive secretary responded in March that these claims would be reviewed during the next Commission meeting in mid-May.

Following this response, the AAAS Committee sent a third communication to the OAS Commission in early May 1977. This communication included the submission of two additional individual cases (Dattori and Barenblitt) for the Commission's review, and also contained two formal requests by the Committee: 1) That the OAS Commission request an on-site investigation in Argentina in order to examine the alleged violations of human rights of scientists and other persons; and 2) That the Committee be given the opportunity to provide witnesses during the May OAS Commission meeting, to speak about the concerns of scientists over human rights violations of their colleagues in Argentina.

The request to provide witnesses was granted by the Commission, and the AAAS Committee invited Dr. Maximo Pedro Victoria, who had himself been imprisoned for seven months in Argentina in 1976, to testify on their behalf. Dr. Victoria appeared before the Commission on May 26, 1977, accompanied by Dr. Jeremy J. Stone, member of the AAAS Committee, and Ms. Rosemary Chalk, the Committee staff officer.

The Committee has not yet learned whether or not the Commission plans to request an on-site investigation in Argentina.

NOTES

1/ Charter of the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, published in SCIENCE, 3 September 1976, p. 877, 921. Point 6 of the Charter states that the Committee is charged with: "maintaining a current awareness of policies and actions of the governments of the United States and other nations which circumscribe scientific freedom and responsibility, including restraints upon the admission of scientists to attend scientific meetings or pursue professional opportunities."

2/ Amnesty International. Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina. Released March 23, 1977, p. 18.

3/ Nicholas Wade. "Repression in Argentina: Scientists Caught Up in Tide of Terror." SCIENCE, 24 December 1976, p. 1398.

4/ Amnesty International. "Argentina: A Survey of Repression in Cultural, Scientific and Related Fields..." 10 January 1977, p. 10.

5/ The SFA Statement regarding dismissals of their membership appeared in SCIENCE (3/) and the January 10 AI report (4/). An incomplete listing of individual members appeared in a letter from C. De Dominicis (President, French Physical Society) in PHYSICS TODAY, February 1977, p. 66.

6/ J. Leite Lopes. "A Scientist's Plea for Human Rights in South America." BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS, December 1976, p. 3.

7/ Nicholas Wade, op. cit. (3/).

8/ OUTREACH, October 1976, p. 9. OUTREACH is published by the Argentine Information Service Center, P.O. Box 4388, Berkeley, Calif. 94704.

9/ Ibid.

10/ Amnesty International, 10 January 1977, op. cit., p. 10.

11/ J. Leite Lopes, op. cit. (6/).

12/ Brian Schwartz, Dept. of Physics, MIT. The information about Dr. Misetich's biography and the details surrounding his arrest are included in a paper titled "Help Antonio Misetich," presented by Schwartz during the Chicago Meeting of the American Physical Society, 7 February 1977.

13/ Ibid.

14/ The biography of Dr. Alvarez Rojas and the details surrounding his arrest are included in an open letter from his father, Mr. Federico Alvarez Rojas, Sr., a civil engineer who still resides in Argentina.

15/ The biography of Dr. Gallardo and the details surrounding his abduction are included in an article titled "Argentine Physicist Jailed in Cordoba," PHYSICS TODAY, June 1976, p. 72.

16 The biography of Dr. Carbelli and the details surrounding her arrest are included in a newsletter dated September 1976, circulated by the Solidarity Committee with the Argentine People (SCAP), New York City.

17 The biography of Dr. Pasquini and the details surrounding his arrest are included in unpublished correspondence to the Argentine Ambassador in Paris from Dr. Dominiciis, President of the French Physical Society, dated June 30, 1976.

18 The biography of Dr. Berman and the details surrounding his arrest are included in the Amnesty International report, 10 January 1977, p. 4.

19 The biography of Dr. Berman and the details surrounding the arrest of her relatives are included in an unpublished letter to CSFR from Ms. Jo Marie Griesgraber of the Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C., dated November 29, 1976.

20 The biography of Ms. Mignone and the details surrounding her abduction are included in an unpublished open letter from her father, Dr. Emilio Mignone.

21 The biography of Mr. Yacub and the details surrounding his arrest are included in an unpublished open letter from the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), dated 17 November 1976.

22 The biography of Dr. Dattori and the details surrounding his arrest are included in a "special action" newsletter from Amnesty International, dated 24 February 1977.

23 The biography of Dr. Barenblitt and the details surrounding his abduction are included in a "special action" newsletter from Amnesty International, dated 25 April 1977.